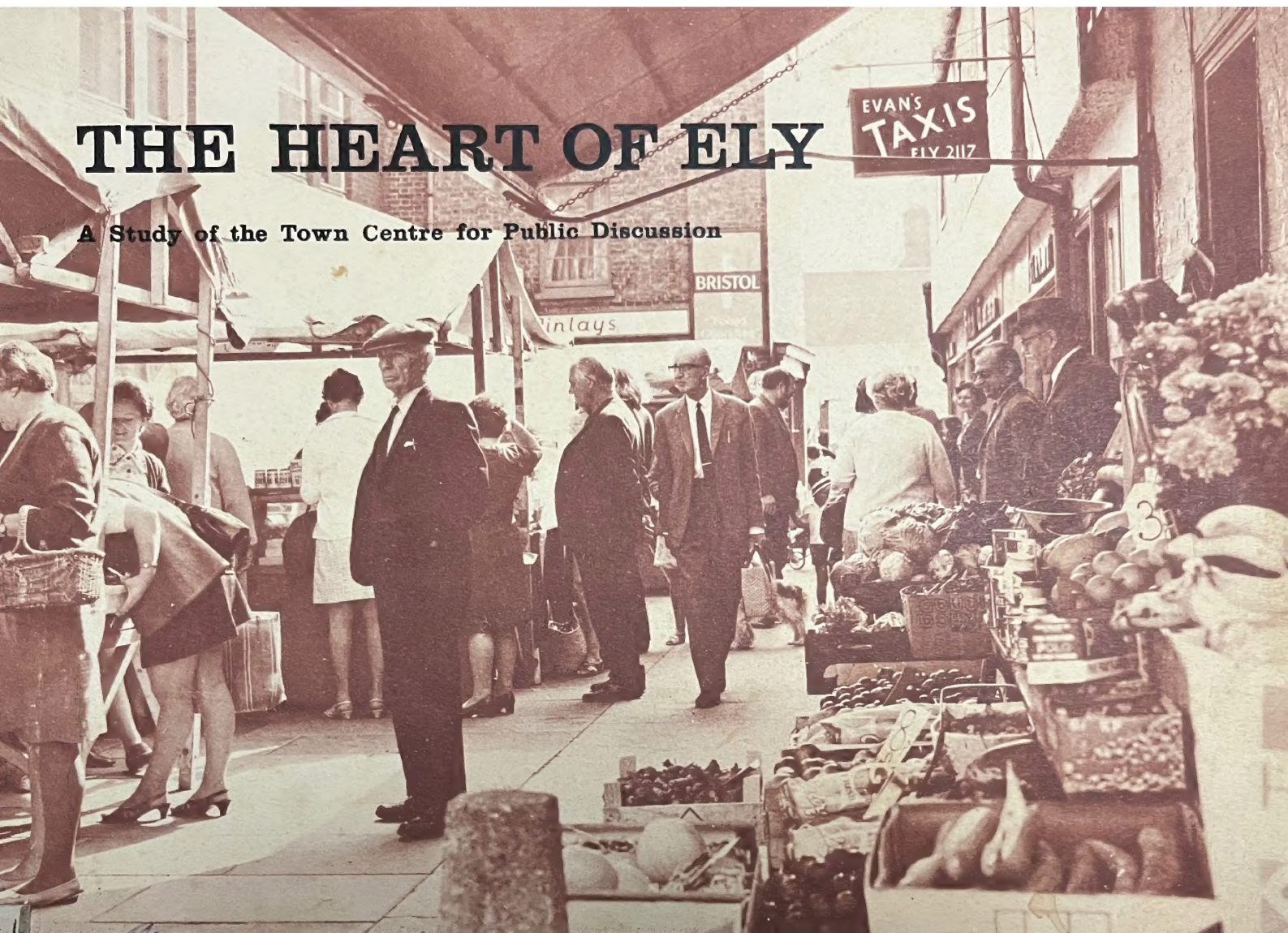


# THE HEART OF ELY

A Study of the Town Centre for Public Discussion





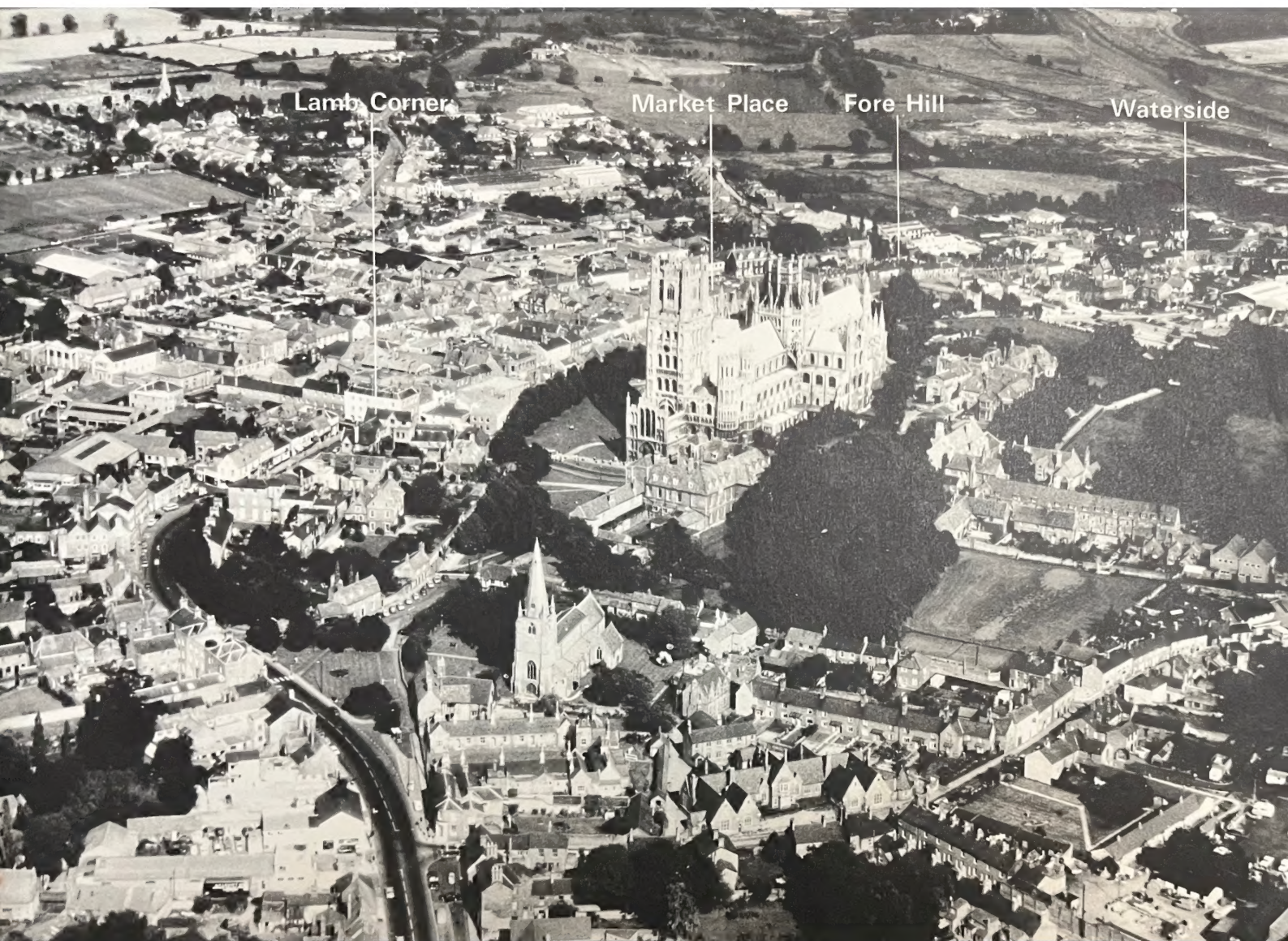
# **THE HEART OF ELY**

**A study of the Town Centre**

**A report for public discussion**

**November 1971**





Lamb Corner

Market Place

Fore Hill

Waterside



**All road proposals shown in this report are  
diagrammatic only**

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**November 1971**



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## The Town Centre Map

- 1.01 The purpose of this report is to examine the future potential of Ely's central area, to suggest ways of dealing with the existing problems, and ways of dealing with future demands. In this way, it will be possible to relate individual proposals to an overall framework. At this stage, a number of alternatives are considered which are presented for general discussion: the preferences that are revealed as a result of discussion will be incorporated in the Town Centre Map. The Town Centre Map is not a statutory document but will outline a strategy which, when approved, will be a guide for the general public and developers alike.

## Background

- 1.02 Medieval Ely was a centre of political and economic power on a scale which could command respect at a national level. Today the pattern has changed. Economically, its position has a local importance in that it provides employment and services for itself and its surrounding villages; but the physical vestiges of Ely's medieval power, in the form of the cathedral and its associated buildings and waterside, have ensured that it still retains a place as part of the national heritage.
- 1.03 Ely's local dominance is exemplified by its weekly market. Although falling within the general sphere of influence of Cambridge, in common with other towns of similar size (St. Ives, Saffron Walden, Newmarket) it serves as a shopping, social and service centre for the surrounding villages.





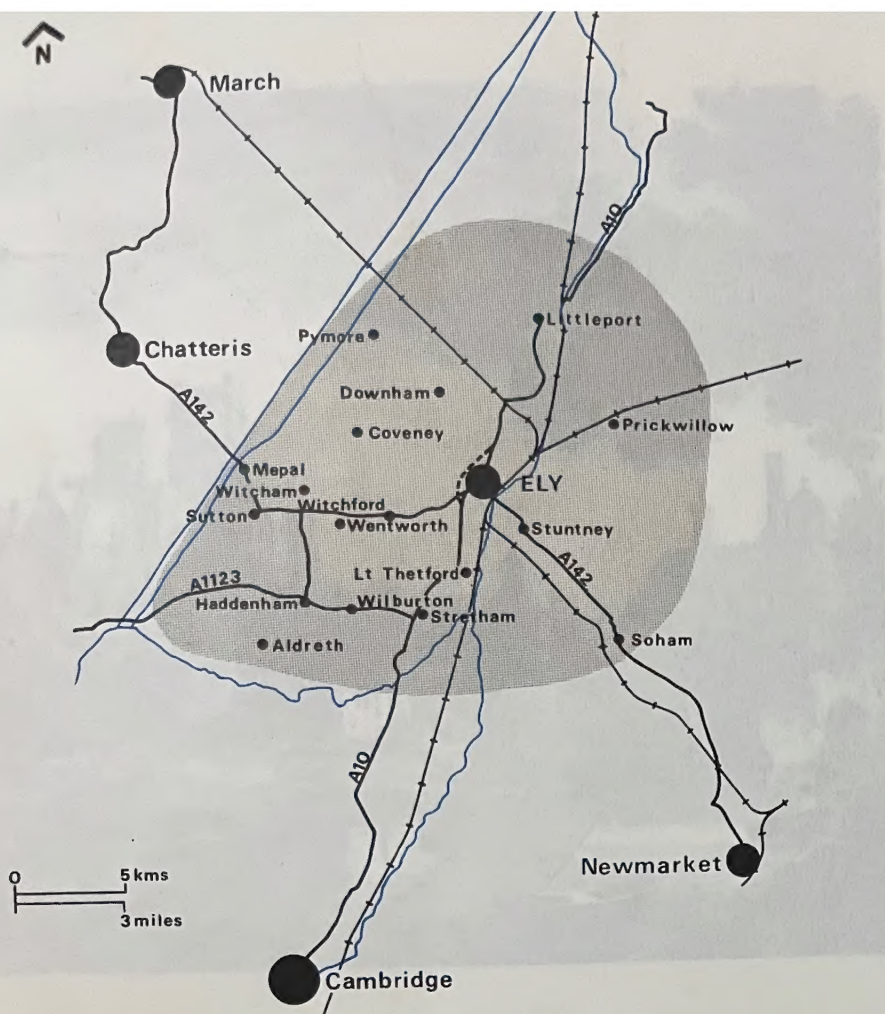


fig1 Ely's Sub-Regional Setting

.. area served by Ely

1.04

Ely's town centre acts as a focus for most of the interest in the town as a whole. The area that had been developed prior to the 19th century still remains the commercial heart of the town, and industry has established itself, to replace water-borne trade, in Riverside. It is possible to identify four distinct categories of people who are in one way or another involved with the centre's future :-

1. The resident population of the central area.
2. Those with commercial and industrial interests within the area.
3. Those who use the area's shopping and market facilities.
4. Tourists and others using the recreational facilities of the area.

1.05

The purpose of preparing a plan for the town centre is to ensure that the interests of these four groups are adequately catered for within the physical framework, and that they can coexist without conflict.

#### Objectives

1.06

It is clearly necessary before embarking on such an exercise to formulate objectives which the plan should attempt to attain. These can be divided into those which concern the physical environment and those which concern the non-physical environment. It will follow that the physical objectives will be complementary to the non-physical, and will stem from them.

1.07

The objectives for the non-physical environment will be :-

1. To help the resident population by maintaining and improving housing within the area if there is a need for it.



2. To satisfy the demands of outside users of the area by improving shopping facilities and the recreational and tourist potential of the area.
3. To promote the economic well-being of the area taking into account future commercial and industrial requirements.

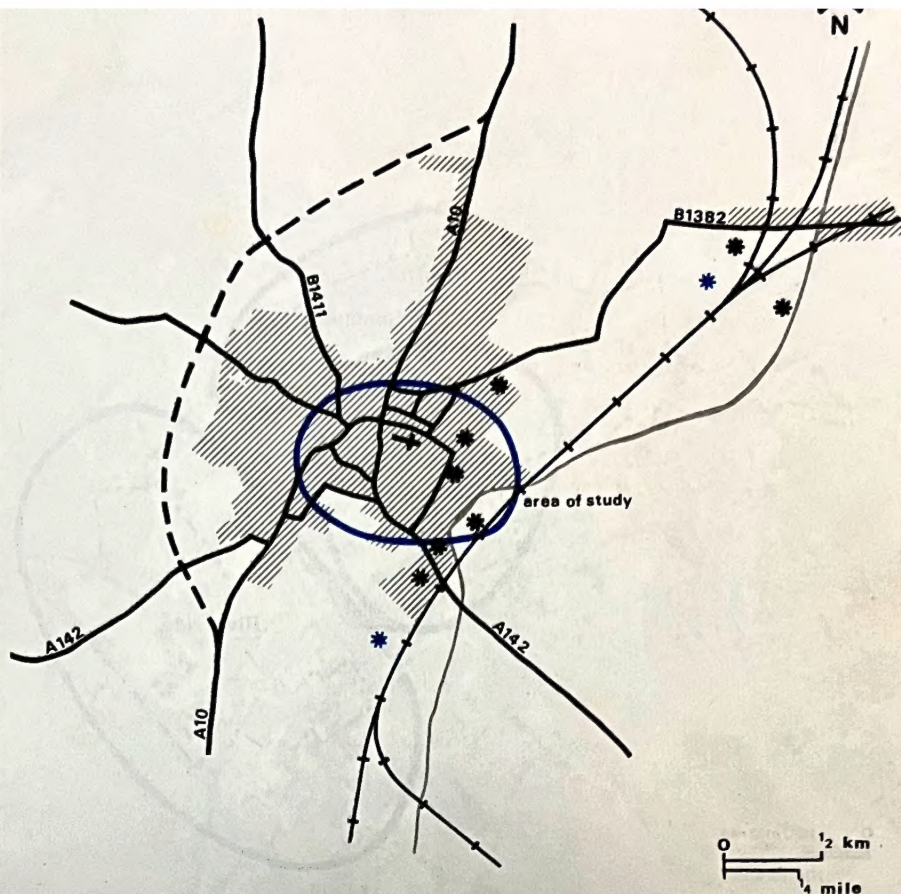
1.08 The objectives for the physical environment will be :-

1. To ensure that the physical environment is adequate to meet the demands placed upon it.
2. To seek ways of conserving the useful life of buildings with historic and architectural merit.
3. To rationalise the traffic pattern generated by the activities within the area.

#### The Present Situation

1.09 The area served by Ely stretches as far as the villages of Soham, Stretham, Sutton and Littleport. Within this area both Littleport and Soham also provide considerable local shopping facilities, but the villages to the south-west are much more reliant on Ely. The population of this area was approximately 31,000 in 1969 and County Development Plan Review foresees an increase to 35,000 by 1981.

1.10 The built-up area of the City of Ely had an estimated population of 8,940 in 1969, and the Town Map allows for an increase to 11,000 by 1981. However, it is clear that though the increase will emphasise pressures on the town, it is not of such a size to create new ones.



built-up area .. .. .  
 existing industrial sites.. \*  
 future industrial sites .. \*

fig 2 The Town as a Whole





1. 11 The town centre area represents the full extent of the town prior to the 19th century. As with the historic cores of many towns, since then its commercial and business use has increased and its residential use decreased, though not yet to the total exclusion of the latter.
1. 12 The town centre is divided into three distinct parts, each with its separate character :-
1. The Cathedral area : This with its open spaces has remained the most stable of the three, and it is not expected to change much in the future. It consists of the Cathedral and its related buildings and the Kings School, part of which is housed in the former monastery.
  2. The Central Shopping area : Focussing on the Market Place, it has developed gradually to assume its present-day form, and though some residential accommodation adjoins it, this area is now largely commercial. Though further changes will take place, the basic pattern of activity has now been established.
  3. Riverside : This is possibly the most susceptible to change. It is already an area of mixed commercial and residential use; the conversion of the Maltings to a public hall and the use of the river bank for pleasure-craft moorings confirm its recreational and leisure uses.
1. 13 Ely has been included in the Council for British Archaeology's list of "heritage towns", a list of over 200 places in England considered to be of historic interest. Because of this, the County Council has already dealt exhaustively with Ely's townscape character in its report "The Character of Ely - Preservation and Change".



1. 14

Detailed policies for the improvement of visual amenities were considered street by street, and a Conservation Area, defined in the report, has now been designated. It is not intended that the proposals in this report should supersede those in the "Character of Ely"; rather, they should be seen as complementary.



## 2 CIRCULATION

### Traffic

- 2.01 Traffic circulation within the town centre consists both of through traffic and traffic generated by activities in the area. A survey was undertaken by the Planning Department in October 1970 to check the size and direction of flows using town centre streets. Survey points were set up on the five major entrances to the town and in High Street. In conjunction with turning counts, it was possible to estimate traffic volume for the main streets. As the survey was undertaken in the Autumn, it could not take into account peak tourist traffic.
- 2.02 The main findings suggest that some 70% of the traffic entering Ely has its destination there. Of through traffic not surprisingly the greatest proportion enters and leaves along Cambridge Road, while Station Road and Lynn Road each carry an equally large part of the remainder.
- 2.03 Although the line of a bypass is drawn on the Town Map passing to the west of the town, investigations are currently being carried out on possible lines both to the east and the west. However, it appears that the effect of a bypass either side of the town would be similar and would reduce traffic on the present A.10 route through the town centre by at least 20%.
- 2.04 The estimated traffic loadings of central area streets reveal that Ely does not yet generally have a serious traffic problem. There is, however, an exception at Lamb Corner. Traffic flows here were estimated to reach some 770 vehicles per hour in both directions at







peak hours which is well in excess of the suggested maximum for such a road, and traffic turning into The Gallery and High Street and out of Market Street adds to congestion. For the pedestrian, crossing at Lamb Corner has become something of a nightmare.

### Parking

- 2.05 Ely is fortunate in possessing a number of off-street car parks. These together provide some 420 parking spaces although 80 spaces are in the newly opened Barton Road site which at 400 metres from Market Square is too far for shoppers, if not for tourists. A further 45 places in the Market Square are not available on Market Day; this loss is only compensated by street parking in Newnham Street.
- 2.06 Some parking is also available in the Riverside area, principally in Annesdale, Waterside and on Annesdale Quay. Further sites have received permission for use as car parks off Little Lane and Jubilee Terrace.

### Pedestrian Circulation

- 2.07 A number of attractive footpaths provide routes for the tourist through the ecclesiastical complex, and the recently completed Riverside walk is a delightful amenity for tourists and residents alike. However, major pedestrian routes lie along High Street, and conflict occurs with traffic not only at Lamb Corner but also at the south-east corner of the Market Place where pedestrians cross to the footpath leading to the Broad Street car park.



### 3 TOWN CENTRE ACTIVITIES

#### Shopping

- 3.01 Most of Ely's shopping area is concentrated on High Street, Market Street, Fore Hill and the Market Place. It is largely housed in eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings though some rebuilding has been undertaken recently.
- 3.02 Messrs. Gerald Eve and Partners were commissioned by the County Council in 1968 to undertake a study of the shopping facilities. They supposed that Ely's dominant position as a service centre was such that it would not in future lose trade to Cambridge, within whose general sphere of influence Ely lies.
- 3.03 They also showed that Ely's shopping floor space was currently under-used and estimated that it could accommodate an increase in trade well in excess of that which they predicted for 1981. The larger increase in trade they estimated might arise if the population in the Ely area were to grow by 6,000 or 7,000, which is twice the growth forecast by the County Development Plan, for 1981.
- 3.04 However, the shopping study also indicated that a gradual modernisation of floor space, improved service access and car parking facilities would be necessary if Ely were to retain its present competitive position.

#### Industry

- 3.05 The industry within the town centre area is concentrated





in Riverside where in the past decade light industries have established themselves. Boat building is carried on across the river on Babylon, and the Ely Trading Estate between Back Lane and Little Lane supports a number of light industries. A further industrial area centres around Station Road.

- 3.06 To the north-east of Willow Walk, the Urban District Council have both a sewage works and a refuse tip. There is also an outstanding permission for an Urban District Council depot on the site north of the sewage works. Currently the only access to these sites is along Lisle Lane and Willow Walk which are in no way suited for industrial traffic.
- 3.07 There is no evidence to suppose that the recent industrial expansion in the Riverside area is likely to continue at the same rate in the future. However, the County Council is actively pursuing a policy of encouraging expansion of employment in Ely; specifically it is hoped to attract scientific and research establishments which have links with Cambridge.
- 3.08 The Town Map currently allows for industrial expansion south of Station Road where some 5.7 hectares (14.1 acres) remain undeveloped. Though outside the town centre area, any increase here would generate traffic which would affect the centre. In addition to the Station Road allocation, there is land in Riverside (approximately 1 hectare - 2.5 acres) by Ship Lane which is allocated for industrial use but not yet taken up. A further area for industry was approved by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 1969 at Queen Adelaide, where Tillotsons have now established a factory; this amounts to over 11 hectares (27.2 acres). Thus no increase in industry need necessarily be located within the town centre.



### Residential Population

- 3.09 A large proportion of the residential population of the town centre area live within Riverside. In order to discover something about the needs of those who live there, a survey was conducted in Riverside. The results of the survey do not necessarily apply to the whole of the town centre.
- 3.10 Apart from revealing the extent of sub-standard housing (half the households interviewed lacked either hot water, a fixed bathtub or inside w. c.), it did show that Riverside provides a pool of cheaper housing, and in doing so apparently fulfils a local need.
- 3.11 The survey also revealed that although the population was not static, in that people were moving into, and out of, the area at a similar rate to the rest of Ely, there is little influx of younger people, and there seem few signs of spontaneous improvement of property within Riverside.

### Tourism and Recreation

- 3.12 The main source of attraction for visitors is not surprisingly the cathedral and its surroundings. It appears that most tourists come for the day only and do not make a significant contribution to Ely's economy.
- 3.13 The river is becoming an increasingly important attraction to Ely. The delightful quayside moorings recently provided along the Riverside Walk are heavily used at summer weekends, and Messrs. Appleyard Lincoln both charter boats and provide permanent moorings on the opposite side of the river. Gerald Eve & Partners believed that the effect of these tourists on Ely trade was "marginal". However, with the national and regional increase in





water recreation, the City could still benefit from this form of tourism.

3. 14

Any increase in tourism will mean that greater attention will have to be given to signposting, car parking and other facilities for the tourists. Such facilities in themselves will inevitably serve to attract others, and this in turn must benefit Ely as a whole.



## 4 PROPOSALS

- 4.01 We have seen that in general Ely does not yet have problems as serious as those that beset many historic towns. Yet, because of Ely's unique character, because of the pressures that more traffic and more tourists will bring, and because of the need to enhance its shopping facilities, it is essential that thought is given now to the ways in which Ely could be improved. The proposals suggested below therefore aim not only to improve the present situation but also to ensure against deterioration that pressures in the future might cause.
- 4.02 The first step in this process of safeguarding Ely would be the construction of a road link from the corner of Barton Road and Parade Lane to Cambridge Road. Along this link would pass all through traffic travelling to and from Soham and beyond, which at the moment uses Silver Street and The Gallery.
- 4.03 Once this link were complete, it would be possible to consider ways of limiting access to The Gallery, so that the Cathedral area could be improved. There are two alternatives to this that might be considered.
- 4.04 The first would be to limit access to The Gallery from Barton Square by closing the junction of Lamb Corner and Minster Place. The advantages of this scheme would be :-
1. It would improve Lamb Corner for traffic by limiting the number of turning movements at the junction.







event, every care would be taken to harmonize alterations with existing fabric.

- 4.07 The general improvement to Bishops Green gained by either of the suggested alternatives above could be consolidated by the closure of St. Mary's Green car park. If this were done, it would be possible to open up a grassed area from St. Mary's Street to the Cathedral.
- 4.08 The second step in the process would be the closure of the junction of Market Street and Lynn Road. This could only be achieved by transferring the bus terminus to another site. It is suggested that a site north of Market Street with access from Nutholt Lane would be suitable; a pedestrian link could be provided to Market Street. Traffic leaving the town centre would use Newnham Street, and a turning head would have to be built at the western end of Market Street. This might affect some street frontages at that point.
- 4.09 The third step would be the provision of a relief road for traffic currently using the central shopping area streets to gain access to Broad Street. Such a route would also aim to provide ready access for traffic to the town centre without that traffic having to use central streets. The suggestion therefore is that a route between Lynn Road and Broad Street running behind the shopping area should be investigated.
- 4.10 Once this road is built improvements to the environment of High Street, Market Place and Market Street would be put in hand. For example, High Street could be closed to traffic during shopping hours and access permitted only for service vehicles at other times. Alternatively, High Street could be closed to traffic except for access, and further restrictions placed on car parking. Market Place would also be restricted to traffic and the car park,





which in any case is not available for use when it is most demanded, could be closed. These suggestions are not hard-and-fast proposals but represent some of the possibilities open if the inner relief road were built, and they are offered for public discussion.

- 4.11 If St. Mary's Green, the Market Place and High Street were all closed for car parking, some 120 places would have to be found elsewhere; and clearly the loss of these areas would only be acceptable if reasonable alternatives were available. The new Newnham Street car park is currently used only to half capacity and leaves some 60 places vacant at peak times. If a further site to the rear of Newnham Street and Market Street were acquired for car parking a further 70 places could be made available, thus meeting present demands. It is obvious that further increases in parking must also be catered for and it is suggested that the cattle market could be reserved for future needs. If this were done, an alternative location for the cattle market would have to be found. This would be outside the town centre area, possibly on one of the industrial sites. The Barton Road car park and the general parking provision in the town centre are adequate for tourists.

- 4.12 These proposals are presented as three consecutive steps, but there are elements in each which could be completed independently of the rest :-

1. The removal of cars from Market Place so that it could be restored to its rightful use as a place for Ely people and visitors to enjoy, is only dependent on the provision of another car park near the centre. A comprehensive scheme of planting and paving could then actively enhance this part of the town.
2. The second step, the closure of Market



Street and the provision of a new bus terminus could be started concurrently with the first step, and it is suggested that further investigations into suitable sites should start immediately.

3. The provision of extra car parking space should also be investigated, as soon as possible, since extra space will be needed if Ely's streets are not to be congested by parked cars, regardless of closures of existing car parks.
4. A further proposal which could be considered immediately is the provision of a footpath to emerge opposite Cutter Lane in Broad Street; this would complete a direct pedestrian link between the cathedral precinct and the river.



# 5 RIVERSIDE

5.01 The proposals described in the last section deal broadly with the structure of the town centre as a whole, but do not deal in detail with Riverside, the area which seems most susceptible to change.

5.02 The problems of Riverside arise from the coexistence of a number of different activities in a rather fragile balance. Many of the houses are still lived in, while some have been turned into offices; and industry is firmly established on several sites. Then there is the Riverside walk which is popular with visitors and Ely people alike; pleasure-craft owners use the present mooring facilities and drink at the Cutter Inn, and the Maltings now provide yet another attraction for leisure hours.

5.03 This overlay of different uses is complicated by Riverside's physical structure. Parts, like Waterside, have considerable attraction; parts have changed radically in the past few years, and parts could change as much in the next few. Indeed, with Riverside it is possible to identify both 'hard' and 'soft' areas. In the 'hard' areas the physical form of the area is unlikely to change, either due to the establishment of a certain use, or due to county policy on conservation. The 'soft' areas are those in which the condition and inadequacies of the buildings are such that their present use is not necessarily assured for the future. Since the 'soft' areas are liable to change, it is obviously desirable to investigate the ways in which change could take place. There are, broadly speaking, four options open in dealing with them.







5.04

The first of these would be to permit development according to the current Town Map allocations. This would involve the retention of areas 1 and 2 for housing and the development of area 3 for commercial use.

**Advantage:** Change would be a gradual process. Familiar landmarks and the existing pattern of streets would not disappear overnight, even though some change would inevitably take place.

**Disadvantages:** 1. Because this option does not control the rate of change there is no way of halting present deterioration in Riverside, and there is the possibility of the area going further downhill.

2. The piecemeal nature of this solution may tend to worsen conflicts between residential and industrial uses, and between people and traffic.

Since rapid change in the physical environment is inevitably distressing to the inhabitants of an area, any option which suggests a gentle pace of change is worthy of consideration. In this case it must be weighed against the possibility of increasing deterioration in the area. Such deterioration might eventually lead to the need for wholesale redevelopment which would defeat the purpose of adopting the option.

5.05

The second option would be like the first in terms of land use, but would involve the renovation of area 2 and the redevelopment of area 1 according to a consistent plan, and implemented as property became available. This option would involve further detailed study by the Urban District Council.

**Advantage:** In a comprehensive scheme such as this it would be possible to introduce

those facilities which the area currently lacks. Conversion of individual dwellings to provide bathrooms and inside lavatories could be considered together with planting and paving schemes, the provision of garages, and the creation of children's play spaces.

Disadvantage: Implementation would not necessarily be easy and would entail financial commitment.

A well-prepared scheme would not merely prevent deterioration to the physical environment but could actually enhance it. It could also be done without displacing residents. The rate of change would be faster than in the first option, but the major problems would be in implementation and finance, and it is these that will be weighed against the advantages.

5.06 The third option would be to suggest all three areas for residential redevelopment by a commercial developer.

Advantage: A skilful exploitation of these areas could enhance the attraction of the area for townspeople and visitors alike and provide housing with up-to-date amenities. Permission to develop could be given on condition that planting and paving schemes were carried out.

Disadvantages: 1. Building costs are such nowadays that a commercial developer would almost certainly only be able to provide houses outside the means of the existing population and thus this option could involve their displacement.



2. It might well be difficult to find a commercial developer willing to undertake the development of this area if stringent conditions were placed on the form of development or the type of housing.

3. There would be no available land for the expansion of existing industrial and commercial uses.

The merits of this option are similar to those in the previous option in that it would result in the positive upgrading of Riverside. But the change to the area's physical form and the effect on its social structure would be considerably more radical and much that is familiar in Riverside would change. Implementation would not necessarily be any easier than in the previous option, and the local authority might again be involved in the acquisition of land.

5.07

The fourth option would be the development of both areas 2 and 3 for industrial or commercial use. Such development would not be recommended within the neighbourhood of The Park, in area 1.

Advantage: It would allow for the further growth of commercial and industrial uses already established within the area and permit the introduction of new ones.

Disadvantages: 1. The conversion of area 2 to industrial use would result in the displacement of residential population.

2. If commerce and industry were to grow here quickly, the traffic they would generate might bring a deterioration in the environment of Broad Street.

There is no reason why modern industry should not be attractive if care is used in siting and planting. On the other hand, as with the previous option, much would change, and there would be some loss of housing. This option would commend itself if there were industry or commerce which needed to have a central site (as opposed to a site in one of the other areas designated in the Town Map) and if it were shown that this was the only viable method of preventing deterioration.

### **Waterside**

- 5.08 Of the 'hard' areas, that which needs urgent attention is Waterside. A number of the buildings are listed as being of architectural and historic merit and the whole falls into the Conservation Area. It is the County Council's policy that the whole of Waterside, which forms a unique group of 18th century domestic buildings, should be preserved and their amenities upgraded.
- 5.09 In the first instance money can only be made available through the Standard and Discretionary Grants procedure. Such grants involve a contribution of at least half the cost of the work involved and if owners are unable to make this contribution then the houses must be acquired and an overall scheme for conversion and improvement carried out. The most suitable agency for this is the Urban District Council; the declaration of Waterside as an Improvement Area would also entitle the Council to grants from the Department of the Environment to deal with external amenities.

### **Moorings**

- 5.10 A further possible development might be considered in Riverside and that is the extension of mooring facilities for pleasure craft north-east of Waterside. It could be done in two ways. Either quayside moorings for casual







users could be provided, as already exist along the Riverside Walk, or long-term moorings, with boats moored stern to the bank. In this case facilities such as lavatories, and possibly a chandlery and store would be needed, and the whole project worked on a commercial basis.

- 5.11 Some 60 or 70 boats could be moored here if the second suggestion were adopted and thus 100 car parking spaces would have to be provided off Willow Walk. It would clearly be necessary for alternative access to Willow Walk to be provided for cars.

## 6 SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 6.01 Future improvements to the town centre can be considered in three stages. The first of these involves the construction of a link from Barton Road through to Cambridge Road. Once this is completed traffic can be diverted from Silver Street and The Gallery and suggestions for reducing traffic passing the west end of the Cathedral are considered.
- 6.02 The second step involves the closure of the Market Street/Lynn Road junction and the consequent relocation of the bus terminus. A site north of Market Street is suggested for this; pedestrian access would be provided through to the shopping area.
- 6.03 The third stage involves the construction of a relief road for the town centre which would link Lynn Road and Broad Street. Once this were completed, control or removal of traffic in High Street and Market Place could be considered.
- 6.04 The first two stages could be started in the near future. Concurrently it is suggested that a replacement for the Market Place car park should be sought so that Market Place would be returned to its rightful use as a place for people to sit in and enjoy.
- 6.05 Riverside is the part of the town centre most likely to change. Four different ways in which it could change, and the implications behind them, are investigated, with advantages and disadvantages of each set out. Upgrading and improvement of Waterside may require the designation of an Improvement Area.



